



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: November 2011

What's On...

Thursday 3rd November, 7-9.00pm
'The Humane Virtues: Courage'

Sunday 6th November, 11am-noon
**'Seeking the
Spiritual in Western Art'**
Led by Sarah Tinker and Heidi Ferid

Sunday 6th November, 12.30-2pm
'Exploring Shapes and Colours'
Workshop with Heidi Ferid

Thursday 10th November, 7-9.00pm
'The Humane Virtues: Fidelity'

Sunday 13th November, 11am-noon
'Remembrance Sunday' led by
Rev. Sarah Tinker and Jim Corrigan

Sunday 13th November, 12.30pm
Small-Group Communion
Led by Jim Corrigan

Sunday 13th November, 2-3pm
Nia Technique
Led by Sonya Leite

Tuesday 15th November, 7-9pm
Creativity Group:
'Bring Your Own Crafts'

Thursday 17th November, 7-9.00pm
'The Humane Virtues: Restraint'

Sunday 20th November, 11am-noon
'Defenders of Faith?'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 20th November, 12.30pm
'Finding Your Voice'
Singing Workshop
Led by Margaret Marshall

Tuesday 22nd November, 7-9pm
Reading Group:
'The Girl Who Trod on a Loaf'
etc. by Hans Christian Andersen

Thursday 24th November, 7-9.00pm
'The Humane Virtues: Generosity'

Sunday 27th November, 11am
'Advent'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Wednesday 30th November, 7-9pm
Management Committee Meeting

A Message from our Minister:

It's Not Fair

The protestors at present camping outside St Paul's Cathedral, as well as those demonstrating in other parts of the world, have a clear complaint: it's not fair. I don't know about you, but I've been grappling with that idea for a long time. As the middle child of five, life provided me with ample opportunities from those earliest years to explore injustice – both as recipient and provider. Our mum wisely held to one clear saying throughout her long years of parenting. "Life isn't fair and nobody ever said it would be," and I just about got the message. But understanding is one thing and accepting is another, and to this day I still think that fairness is worth pursuing, even in a world as economically unbalanced as ours.



Back in 2009 a study of 71 countries carried out by a university research team led by Professor Friedel Bolle showed that countries where there was the smallest gap between rich and poor also demonstrated the highest levels of happiness. People prefer to be more equal. Charles Darwin, whose theory of evolution was based upon the idea of 'survival of the fittest' also delighted in studying cooperation amongst animals. We humans clearly have contradictory urges. On the one hand we have a drive to succeed, even if it is at the expense of others, and we also have a desire to help others and to work together. We can see these urges being played out in our society today as well as in our own individual lives.

But on a planet that has finite resources and with an ever growing human population maybe we now have to find new ways of being that will allow all to 'live long and prosper'. And how shall we define such prosperity? When I hear gloomy predictions that growth in our economy is down to below 1% I wonder if we shouldn't be looking for an altogether different model. Capitalism requires growth but can such growth be endlessly sustainable? Can we find another way of shaping our world economies that is not based on forever discovering new markets or on gambling with the world's commodities, a form of money creation that can leave the poorest literally starving?

The Occupy London group may well have to move on from St Paul's and I doubt any of our Unitarian congregations have gardens large enough to offer them hospitality. But I hope that their message, and the message of increasing numbers of protestors from around the world, is heard and acted upon. There must be ways to bring justice and fairness into our economic systems and to seek out such new ways of being may help both our planet and its inhabitants to survive.

"The miracle is this: the more we share the more we have." – Leonard Nimoy

Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this month's newsletter...

* 'A Charity we Support: ORBIS' by Sue Smith * 'Singing in Community' Report *
'The Humane Virtues' - RE Course * 'Social Action for the Faith Hearted' - LDPA
* 'Big Voice Goes to South Africa' by Jennie Blair * Book now for FUSE Festival *
'Thank You, Miss Hewson' by John Hands * 'It's All About Trust' by Sarah Tinker
* 'Benedict's Message for Unitarians' - sermon by David Darling * and much more...

Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

Kensington Unitarians meet to share experiences, to learn from each other, to explore our diverse faiths, to welcome spiritual seekers and offer companionship on life's journey.

The community meets for a service each Sunday at 11.00am. The format varies, and usually includes music, singing, meditation, an address, an opportunity to share joys and concerns, and a children's group. Our wide range of activities includes religious education courses and spirituality workshops, meeting for fellowship, engagement groups on a variety of themes, community arts projects, regular chanting and dance sessions, and opportunities for quiet meditation. All are welcome to come and join us.

Many other groups share our church building. If you are interested in hiring one of our rooms for your own organisation or event please contact our warden by telephone or email.



Kensington Unitarians at Essex Church
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Notting Hill Gate
London W8 4RT

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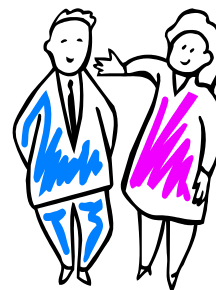
December/January Newsletter Deadline



The deadline for submitting items for the next issue is **Sunday 13th November**. This will be a double issue for Dec/Jan. Please send your contributions (articles, poems, news, etc...) to Jane Blackall or a committee member by that date.

Thank you!!!

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

6 th November:	Gina Bayley / Ruth Okine
13 th November:	John Hands
20 th November:	Natasha Drennan
27 th November:	Tristan Jovanović

Coffee:

6 th November:	Caroline Blair
13 th November:	Ruth Okine
20 th November:	Carol Sheppard
27 th November:	Jo Ridgers

Greeting:

6 th November:	Tracey Hart
13 th November:	Arthur Krebbers
20 th November:	Susan Smith
27 th November:	Gina Bayley

In recent months, we have been circulating the rota list via email, and this seems to be working well.

Please contact Jane with your email address if you are willing to receive this email once a month.

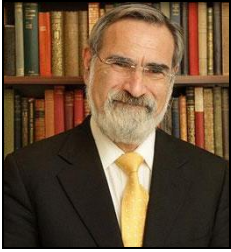
rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

'Exploring Shapes and Colours'

Sunday 6th November, 12.30-2.00pm



After the service on Sunday 6th November, there will be a practical art workshop, 'Exploring Shapes and Colours', led by our own Heidi Ferid. No previous experience is required, and materials will be provided. All are welcome.



“The truths of religion are exalted, but its duties are close at hand. We know God less by contemplation than by emulation. The choice is not between 'faith' and 'deeds,' for it is by our deeds that we express our faith and make it real in the life of others and the world.

Jewish ethics is refreshingly down-to-earth. If someone is in need, give. If someone is lonely, invite them home. If someone you know has recently been bereaved, visit them and give them comfort. If you know of someone who has lost their job, do all you can to help them find another. The sages call this 'imitating God.' They went further: giving hospitality to a stranger, they said, is 'even greater than receiving the divine presence.' That is religion at its most humanizing and humane.”

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Committee News



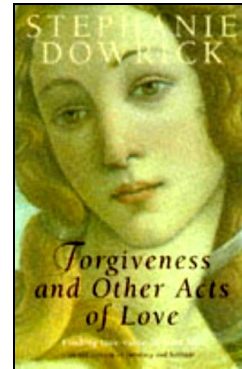
1. We have received a detailed report on the leaking roof from civil engineering company Eastwood & Partners. They have made several recommendations, and advised us to start with the smallest and work towards the larger jobs in the hope that the leaks stop along the way.
2. We are just about to pay the third year's money to support our two Swazi orphans (via SOS Children's Villages), Patience and Fortunate Zeeman.
3. We have made a donation to West London Churches Homeless Concern, which provides a night shelter and year round advice and support for street homeless people in the area.
4. It was agreed that we could occasionally have an instrumentalist in the Sunday service instead of the choir.
5. The FUSE weekend in Worthing (starting on the 3rd February 2012) still has places for those interested in workshops/get-togethers for all the churches in London and the South East. Anyone interested is invited to have a word with a committee member regarding possible subsidies by the church.
6. The LDPA (Unitarian London/SE District) rainbow group for Lesbians, Gay men, Bisexuals, and Queer, Inter-sex and Transgender People launched on 15th October. For further information, visit www.unitarian.org.uk/rainbow.

Caroline Blair

A New Adult RE Course at Essex Church this Autumn:

'The Humane Virtues'

Six Thursday evenings from 3rd November



This autumn we will be running an evening course based on the book *'Forgiveness and Other Acts of Love'* by Stephanie Dowrick. In turn we will consider a number of what she calls the 'great humane virtues'.

3rd November – **Courage**
 10th November – **Fidelity**
 17th November – **Restraint**
 24th November – **Generosity**
 1st December – **Tolerance**
 8th December – **Forgiveness**

Those taking part in the course will need to read a chapter each week to prepare so **please do let Jane or Sarah know ASAP if you would like to take part.**

Jane Blackall

Featuring our own Veronica Needa of True Heart Theatre

'Big Sunday'

A Mini-Festival of Playback Theatre

**20th November at the New Diorama Theatre
 15-16 Triton St, Regent's Place, NW1 3BF**

Dynamic, stimulating, moving, challenging entertainment that builds community through personal stories. Your stories made into immediate theatre! On 'Big Sunday' there will be four Playback theatre companies performing.

11am – Introductory Playback Workshop (£14)
 2.30pm – 'What Makes You Tick?' (£10/£8)
 5pm – 'You Tell, We Play' (£10/£8)
 7.30pm – 'At Your Service' (£15/£10)

To book tickets go to www.newdiorama.com
 or call the box office on 020 7383 9034



**A Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms
Sessions led by Sonya Leite**

**Second Sunday of the Month
from 2-3pm: 13th November**

An hour of whole-body conditioning, done barefoot to diverse music. Delivering a cardiovascular workout for any level of fitness. Specific routines allow you to experience - the power of the martial arts, the stillness of the healing arts and the joy of movement through dance. Cost now £8 (£5 members). **Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674.**

A London event you might be interested in:

**Terry Eagleton:
'Compassion and Power'**



Part of the "Radical Compassion: the Gospel and Social Justice" series at St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, London WC2N 4JJ

Wednesday 16th November, 7.00-8.30pm

This autumn lecture series seeks to examine the radical implications of Christ's life and transforming compassion in relation to issues of social justice. What is Christ saying to the poor, marginalised, and the struggles of our time? Can we rediscover a theology of liberation for today?

Widely regarded as Britain's most influential literary theorist, Terry Eagleton will consider the contemporary relevance of the Gospel's critique of power and the use of violence, drawing on themes discussed in his 2010 Richard Price Memorial Lecture 'New Atheism & the War on Terror'.

Tickets are free and there is no need to reserve in advance.

Essex Church Reading Group

**'The Girl Who
Trode on a Loaf'
(and other stories)
by Hans Christian Andersen**



Tuesday 22nd November 2011, 7.00-9.00pm

The reading group's November session will be based on the stories of Hans Christian Andersen, in particular 'The Girl Who Trode on a Loaf'. This is a very short story and, as with almost all of Andersen's tales, can be read online for free at www.andersen.sdu.dk (click on the appropriate flag in the top right hand corner to read the website in English). This book was suggested by Caroline Blair.

From a review of a recent collection of his tales:

"With this new translation and selection, the unique inventiveness of Andersen's genius is revealed. At a time when children's stories were formal, moral and didactic, Hans Christian Andersen revolutionized the genre, giving an anarchic twist to traditional folklore and creating a huge number of utterly original stories that sprang directly from his imagination. From the exuberant early stories such as The Emperor's New Clothes, through poignant masterpieces such as The Little Mermaid and The Ugly Duckling, to the darker, more subversive later tales written for adults, the stories included here are endlessly experimental, both humorous and irreverent, sorrowful and strange."

The group takes special care to ensure that everybody gets an equal opportunity to speak and be listened to. Members come together to share our diverse views and appreciate our differences in a spirit of curiosity and respect. The group has a relaxed and easy-going atmosphere and newcomers are always most welcome to come along to any session. The group has been meeting monthly since 2003. We take turns in choosing a book for everybody to read so we tackle a wide variety of material. For more information see:

www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk/book.html

A Charity We Support: ORBIS

For several years now I have been contributing to ORBIS, the international sight-saving charity. When deciding to give a charitable donation I always have the nagging question "is my money going to be used effectively". There are some pretty horrific stories circulating about the misuse of money. I have confidence in ORBIS because their goal setting strategy is very familiar to me and they keep me well informed about how they are achieving their goals.



ORBIS is in the business of preventing blindness in the world's poorest countries. Eight in ten cases of blindness, in these countries, are completely avoidable. One of the many ORBIS projects is the flying Eye Hospital, a state-of-the-art hospital with wings which travels to such places as Mongolia, Uganda and Vietnam saving the sight of vulnerable people dealing with such eye conditions such as strabismus, cataract and retinal damage. The medical team and flight deck crew are all volunteers and on board the flying hospital there is an operating theatre and training facilities to pass on skills to as many local medical eye specialists as possible. Another recent project involved the distribution of antibiotics preventing trachoma in Ethiopia; a collaboration with Pfizer and BBC Radio 4. ORBIS is a founding member of VISION 2020, a coalition of eye care organisations, working in conjunction with the WHO, local and national Governments, UN agencies and others.

"Esther was five years old and had strabismus. Because she was born in Uganda she faced losing more of her vision day by day, until the day when her blindness would become incurable. Without sight she'd almost certainly never go to school, marry and have a family, or earn a living. Luckily for Esther the ORBIS plane made a sight-saving journey to Uganda and her life changed forever."

Susan Smith

For information about the work of this charity, or to donate, visit the website: www.orbis.org.uk (or call 020 7608 7260)

Small Group Communion



Sunday 13th November at 12.30pm
Downstairs in the Church Library

On the second Sunday of each month we hold a small-group communion, after the main morning service, downstairs in the church library. We have been experimenting with services led by a variety of different people over the last year and we have been very encouraged by the experience so far.

We hope that a team of volunteers will continue to take turns leading the small-group communion services so that we can experience different approaches. The line-up for the next few months is as follows:

13th November – Jim Corrigan
11th December – Tristan Jovanović
8th January – David Francis Darling
12th February – Jane Blackall

If you would like to find out more about this then please feel free to speak to Jane Blackall or Tristan Jovanović.

An event from the Unitarian District Association (LDPA):

'The Heart and Soul of Worship'



Saturday 26th November, 10:30 – 4:00pm
Richmond Unitarian Church, Ormond Road,
Richmond, Surrey TW10 6TH

What is the essence of worship in the Unitarian tradition? Is it an hour of playing with an interesting idea, or does it go deeper? How do you craft a service which not only speaks to the intellectually curious but feeds the spiritually hungry? In what ways and to what extent can the personal struggles and experiences of the worship leader be engaged as spiritual exploration and deepening for the congregation?

Linda Hart, Minister at Richmond & Putney, and David Usher, District Minister, will co-lead this Workshop on Saturday 26th November as an introduction to a Worship Leadership Course to be run in the spring.

Cost: £10. To register, please send cheques, payable to LDPA, to Rev. David Usher (at 10 Bradbourne Road, Sevenoaks, Kent, TN13 3PY) by 21st November.

'It's All About Trust'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker – 9th October 2011

An audio podcast of this sermon is available on our website.

You might know the story of the Jewish father whose little son was standing up on a wall and, as children sometimes do, he shouted out “catch me dad” and jumped towards his father’s outstretched arms. But this loving father, instead of catching his son, moved to one side and let the boy fall to the floor. The child looked up at his dad and asked through his tears ‘why didn’t you catch me?’ and the father replied ‘because you need to learn an important lesson in life son, and learn it whilst you’re young – trust nobody!’

I checked this story out with a couple of Jewish friends as to its political correctness and they reckoned that this kind of earthy realism is a mark of their own Jewish upbringing and that its common sense message actually pervades human interactions. We are taught, most of us, to be sensible, to watch our backs, to guard our own self interests.

But if we check out the world of therapy and personal growth the call to explore our boundaries of trusting is heard loud and clear. No wonder then that the drama therapy movement developed so many trust games to help people explore their feelings of trust and distrust. You’ve perhaps been taken on a blindfold walk by a partner and been given various sensory experiences to enjoy. Or maybe you’ve stood in the middle of a circle of people and then gently allowed your body to fall towards someone, trusting that they will gently pass your body weight to the person next to them, whilst you remain soft and pliant, accepting and trusting. Such exercises can be taken to more extreme lengths, some of which – having experienced them, I’d probably not recommend to many of you. Years ago when I was working as a drama teacher, we invited a theatre group to work with my class of 13 year olds. We focused on trust. So able to let go were these youngsters that we graduated quickly to more advanced exercises. The final task involved a chair set on top of a table. Two of us held the chair legs to stop it slipping and everyone else stood in front of the chair in two rows, facing each other, with outstretched arms. The person who stood on top of the chair, on top of the table, had simply to let themselves fall into the outstretched arms.

It was a remarkably successful morning – to fall in that way and feel yourself caught by others is a wonderful experience. Then it came to a boy called Chris Martin’s turn. Not the easiest of youngsters – in fact Chris was an expert in making other people’s lives difficult both at home and at school. He found it hard to take instructions and that’s perhaps why, when we told him to let himself fall – rather like a felled tree trunk might fall, instead Chris leapt from the chair. This movement might better be described as a dive, in which he propelled himself so effectively that we all watched in dawning horror as his body shot past the arms outstretched to catch him and he fell head first onto the concrete classroom floor beyond. He knocked himself out, I had to drive him to hospital, and go round to his parents that night to apologise. They, bless them, told me that I shouldn’t have bothered – that he was perfectly alright now and in any case his mum said – “Our Christopher is such a pain in the backside we wouldn’t have minded if he’d dived straight out of the window”.



Trust has, I suspect, always been an issue for humanity, but it certainly is a key theme in 21st century public life. There seems to me to be an increasing sense of unease – can we trust our politicians, our bankers, our public servants, our newspapers, can we trust people who are different from us in some way, can we trust our economic systems? At times such as these it is all the more important then that people with a spiritual foundation to their lives provide a more calming viewpoint. But of course religious groups themselves may use the spirit of the time, this sense of unease, to help strengthen their own message. Michaela, who is even now winging her way to Germany, read me an emailed story from a friend of hers, telling of an encounter on her doorstep that happened shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in America. Michaela’s friend saw two dark suited figures approaching her door and wondered who they were. They were Jehovah’s Witnesses and as she opened the door to them one of them, a young woman, opened her Bible and began to speak, of the need to trust in the Lord. Referring to the recent atrocities she said “look at our world, you can’t trust anyone anymore can you.” Michaela’s friend experienced a moment of absolute stillness and emptiness as she heard those chilling words, “you can’t trust anyone anymore can you, with those guys out there” – meaning those who might commit terrorist attacks in the future. And then she described a moment of clarity as she replied that on the contrary all there is, is trust.

“You know, I thank you, but all I do is trust. This is none of my merit. It is how I am built, how we all are built. And besides, trust or not, we all will be seemingly betrayed or let down, trusting or not, but it is so much lighter and easier to trust than not – so that’s why I just trust’. This reply stopped the young woman on the doorstep completely in her tracks – which is unusual perhaps for Jehovah’s Witnesses. She closed the Bible and said ‘God bless you’, and I said, ‘and God bless you’ and the ‘guys out there’, and off they went. And after that I realized that I had been shown what had always been that way: there is only trust! Trust, to me, is like joy, like an unearned gift.”

'It's All About Trust'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker *(continued)*

This is very similar to the message that Osho was delivering in the reading we heard earlier on. Trust, not as a means to an end, but as trust in trust itself, in life itself, despite everything, despite all evidence to the contrary. Trust, trust, trust. The other word for this might be faith – not faith as in our adherence to a particular set of beliefs or doctrines or allegiance to a particular religious group. Faith rather as an unfolding process, what Buddhist writer Sharon Salzberg describes as 'trusting our own deepest experiences'. For her, faith is a verb not a noun – faith is something we do rather than have, our faith must be acted on, renewed, again and again and again as we live our lives and respond to the events that occur around us.

There is a classic book 'Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development' written by James Fowler, in which he identifies 6 stages of faith development in human beings. Whilst his clearly defined stages have been critiqued by other academics nonetheless they remain a well regarded system to show how we develop from the earliest stages in childhood. Fowler's first stage refers to early childhood, the ages from around 2 to 7, when children trust in what they see and hear from the adults they are close to. Children at this stage expect everybody else's experiences to mirror their own.

Stage Two could be described as the The Literalist, which spans from around age 8 into adolescence. Trust during this stage is now placed in stories and explanations that are understood literally. The transition from this stage begins when the contradictions found in stories leads the child to reflect and question.

Fowler's Stage Three refers to early adulthood when the need to belong becomes paramount and trust is placed in the group and in security. Fowler felt that most people's faith development stopped at this stage, when trust is placed in a religious hierarchy and questions are no longer asked. If a transition is to be made from this stage it comes from an experience that breaks the individual's trust in a particular authority figure, group, or set of beliefs. Doubts can no longer be stifled and leads to Stage Four, where the person embarks on a spiritual search. This is often an individual path in which the seeker pursues what feels right to them and trusts in their own personal search for truth and meaning. One's own experience becomes of great import at this stage of faith development and the person will prefer to rest in uncertainties and questions rather than seeking answers.

In the fifth stage of Fowler's system a person places their trust in the unknown – in paradox, ambiguity, and uncertainty. There is no longer an expectation that clear answers can ever be found. A person understands the phrase: "Good news, bad news, who can say?" that we heard in the story earlier on of the farmer with his son and the herd of wild horses. At this stage the wisdom of all faiths is appreciated and there is no need to judge the beliefs of others.

In the final and sixth stage Fowler identified a trust in the universality of all existence. Such people are able to let go of their own needs and instead give their lives in a commitment to unifying everything. They feel called by the Divine or by the demands of the time in which they live to dedicate themselves to world transformation. Few people reach this stage. Fowler writes of leaders such as Jesus, Mohammad, the Buddha, Martin Luther King Jnr, Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela.

Fowler's system has been criticised for being too rigid and for sticking to a ladder-like image of progression from one faith stage to another. Another model might be of a spiral where our faith develops over time and we may return to previous phases yet bringing new perspectives gleaned from our life experiences. Or we might see faith development as waves on a shore – ebbing and flowing as we respond to life.

Whatever model we use, for any of us who have chosen a spiritual path in life there will be times when we need to examine our faith and re-assess. Years ago I spent time with a spiritual director grappling with issues of my own faith and I will always remember the session when she said gently to me, after listening to weeks of my questions, my doubts, my confusions – "in the end Sarah; it's all about trust. And the question is – will you trust? Will you trust yourself, will you trust life, will you trust whatever you choose to name as a higher power in your life – be that God, the universe, the great spirit, the ground of all being?" It's all about trust. Those words have stayed with me ever since.

In any exploration of trust we need I think to acknowledge how very different our life experiences are. Some people have to endure experiences that most of us may read of only in books or newspapers. Some people are challenged beyond all imagining. What is remarkable I think is that despite everything, in the direst of circumstances, some people still remain open and trusting; they overcome situations that would leave many of us bitter and resigned and instead retain their trust. Trust / faith – call it what you will – but it lifts them beyond bitterness, resentment and resignation to a far lighter place, where they retain an innocent trust in themselves, in life and in trust itself. This is the place in which we can say 'good luck, bad luck, let's wait and see'. We know that life will not always go our way but we trust in something deeper, something that resides both in our very core, and beyond any sense of our individual identity, that will enable us to adapt and to respond to whatever may be.

Such levels of trust do not mean that we lose our powers of discernment – that Arabian proverb – 'trust in Allah, but tie up your camel' expresses the value of good sense. But there are so many ways to tie up a camel aren't there. We can tie up a camel fearfully or resentfully, with pinched, anxious, suspicious hearts and minds, or we can tie up a camel with joy and good humour and an acceptance that even with the best knots in the world our camel may or may not be there in the morning. Who knows?

Social Action for the Faith Hearted



This workshop was really called 'for the faint hearted' but its message was far more inspiring than that sounds. It was run by Karen Hanley at our Golders Green Chapel as part of a London District quarterly meeting along with worship and other activities led by Sheena Gabriel, lay person in charge at our Godalming congregation and ministry student.

Both leaders were excellent – managing to be both inspiring and realistic. They helped us to list the many causes that Unitarians had been involved with actively in history – education for all, women's education and emancipation, health improvement projects, celebrating same sex relationships, to mention just a few. Then we filled sides of flipchart paper with lists of social justice projects that our congregations are actively involved with now. And then we were taught a simple but effective project planning method to help us start new initiatives or 'build capacity' (increase the size or scope of existing projects we support).

The moments I appreciated the most were when we were asked searching questions. You might like to ask yourselves some of these. What are you passionate about? What is in your heart and soul? They suggested that we complete the sentence 'the way I'd really like to help is...' in as many ways as we liked. Another suggestion was to consider how you would like your church to be known in the community as... the church that does...' I thought with pride of how many people I've met over the years who know us at Essex Church because of coming to some group or other activity held here. But how else might we wish to be known in the years ahead?

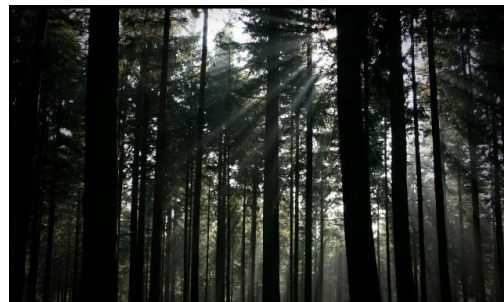
Sarah Tinker

"Humility is a spiritual activity. It is opening the hands in love, extending the hands outward to other people, extending the open hands upwards to God, and receiving in an open heart the spirit of humility. Humility is letting that spirit come into us and energize our hands to be helping hands. May we each receive this simple spirit of humility. May we grow in trust that our own needs are met so we may seek to understand and try to meet the needs of others."

Everett L. Worthington, Jr.

An event from the Art and Spirituality Network:

'Darkness and Light: Two Central Mysteries'



A day workshop exploring our artistic and spiritual responses to the mysteries of darkness and light

Saturday 12th November, 2.00-8.30pm
Wanstead Quaker Meeting House, Bush Road, E11 3AU

Led by Maggie and Melvyn Freake

A hands-on workshop exploring our responses to the central mysteries of darkness and light in spiritually-led and creative ways, including through the art materials and the words we use. The workshop will start when the sun is high in the sky and will proceed through the gathering dusk into darkness. At a time of year when we are aware of the darkness drawing in, we can feel the need for celebrations of light. No prior artistic experience is needed and all materials are provided. But bring food to share and words, images etc that you associate with the themes of light and darkness.

- 2.00pm:** Registration, tea and coffee provided
- 2.30pm:** Introduction of themes
– showing objects you have brought
- 3.00pm:** An enquiry into lightness followed by a creative activity
- 4.30pm:** An enquiry into darkness followed by a creative activity
- 6.00pm:** Supper – bring veggie food to share with our soup
- 7.00pm:** Incorporating light and darkness, including a creative activity
- 8.00pm:** Sharing our work and thoughts in a communal display
- 8.30pm:** Workshop ends (with hot drinks)

Cost £10, including all materials, and hot and cold drinks.
Please wear old clothes or bring an apron.

For further information about this event and to book, contact melvynfreake@lineone.net / 020 8554 9310.

To find out about the Art and Spirituality Network:
www.artandspirituality.net

'Singing in Community' with Jo McAndrews



Thanks to Veronica Needa for organising the two-day singing workshop led by Jo McAndrews from Stroud. It was a delight to learn new songs, meet new people and be reminded just how transformatory sound can be. Veronica's colleagues from Playback Theatre treated us on the Saturday afternoon to a short demonstration of their work, where having asked someone how they were feeling they would respond in movement and sound, mirroring back someone's experience to them. Quite a remarkable experience. Thanks too to Jo, who travelled to be with us, and to lead us in a gentle and encouraging way to make music together with some wonderful harmonies. I hope we can persuade her to visit us again before too long.

Sarah Tinker

I wasn't able to attend the workshop on Saturday but did manage to stay behind on Sunday and am so glad that I did as the feeling I got from singing with such a lovely group of people was one of pure joy and I really feel that my spirits were wonderfully lifted. The singing was joyous and emotional and fun and very, very moving. Jo is an inspired teacher and so warm and infectious in her love of music and singing. To be able to fill the beautiful space of Essex Church with such beautiful sounds was a treat indeed. In fact, I left the church at the end of the day feeling on a real high and that feeling has stayed with me for the rest of the week. Tired though I'm sure we all were towards the end of the session, I cannot begin to tell you how special it was for me to be able to sing 'I Am a River' again. This particular song holds a lot of very special memories for me and to hear all the different voices tumbling and 'flowing' over each other in the way that they did will also stay with me for a long time to come. So to all, many, many thanks for the experience.

Carol Sheppard



A New Community Choir!

Following on from this singing weekend, there is the seeding of a Community Choir in the Ladbroke Grove, Notting Hill area. The first meeting took place on 11th October, led by the fabulous violinist Jenny Thorn, who played for us at the service on 2nd October. We will meet fortnightly at Jenny's studio from 7-9pm to begin to sing together: 25th October, 8th and 22nd November, and 6th December at Studio 4, 2 Olaf Street, London W11 4BE. The entrance is at the corner of Olaf Street and Willow Way. We think that signing up for all 5 sessions for £30 (£6 per session) feels like a reasonable fee to ask for whether you miss any sessions or come for all – encouraging commitment! It's a short walk from

Latimer Road Tube, or a slightly longer walk from Shepherd's Bush Central Line, or Shepherd's Bush overground station. We can only fit up to 15 people in that space so please let Jenny know (jen.thorn@uwclub.net) if you are coming. Please do let friends know too. Then at the end of this batch of sessions, we can all contemplate the next stage...

Veronica Needa (vneeda@googlemail.com)

‘Thank You, Miss Hewson’

As I have been getting older I have thought of many people I have known in my earlier life to whom I have come to feel I owe a considerable debt of gratitude. Happily I have been able to contact, or occasionally even meet just a few of them again, in order to express my gratitude in person. But sadly too I have either not been able to contact them, or have discovered they have died. Even more regrettably I have left it too long before trying to get in touch with them, and so am left with a burden of obligation which I shall not be able to set down in this life.



One of these people was Miss Hewson. I think – but can't be sure – that her first name was Clare. Unlike most teachers in the schools I attended, we never used her name mockingly behind her back or in the playground, so I really can't remember for sure. It was sometime during the earlier part of 1942 when she came to teach us at the little village school in rural Worcestershire, instead of Miss Catherine Jervis ("Kate" – or "old Kate" to us). Miss Jervis too was one of those people to whom I owe considerable gratitude, and although she died long ago, I have in effect offered her memory my gratitude in a series of four plays, in which she is one of the two principal protagonists.

Miss Hewson wasn't a bit like Kate Jervis. For one thing she was tall and motherly, and much younger, and so had benefited from forms of teacher-training unknown in Kate's younger days. I know this because, having been a teacher myself, I know how much things had been changing in the pedagogic world during the later 'thirties. When Miss Hewson came to us I was about half way through my thirteenth year, and knew that before long, when I was fourteen, I would leave school and enter the heavy, cloud-obscured world of adult work. I had no idea what I would do exactly, but knew that my father was grimly determined I would never be a farm-hand, and would somehow learn to become a radio engineer, although this might have to wait until after the war.

Unfortunately for his well-meant ambition for me, and unbeknown to him, I had begun to apply myself to writing "essays", short plays, and even poetry at school, and Miss Hewson encouraged me in every way she could – not so much in terms of advice and corrections of my very shaky spelling, but largely by allowing me to abandon the rest of the curriculum in order to concentrate upon my burgeoning literary labours.

The only other activity (apart from playing up at playtime) I can remember now, is that because of my Dad's influence, I was also acquiring an interest in repairing radio-sets, and was sometimes able to repair the school radio, which Miss Hewson had progressively brought out of a cupboard for our instruction and entertainment. I know this for sure because somewhere I have a little note written on school notepaper by Miss Hewson to my Mother, in which she wrote she had heard we were leaving the village, and wonders how they were going to get on without having "your big son" in class to repair the radio.

The war was in full spate, so perhaps not surprisingly the themes of most of my effusions were on those aspects of the war which came to me via the radio at home, and the 'Daily Mirror' which my father brought home with him from his daily work at the (then) Longbridge aircraft factory. But Miss Hewson never demurred, or suggested I should search for more suitable child-centred themes. She simply let me get on with it – including making many drawings of battle scenes which she quietly hung around the classroom walls.

Of course I now know that she couldn't possibly have done anything better, or any more to encourage my growing desire to express myself in words. Perhaps too she understood it was also my way of relieving myself of the growingly oppressive atmosphere of the war which even in rural Worcestershire, sometimes seemed to me like a long dark tunnel we were all travelling through, with no end in sight.

Whatever it was, and however it was, I want to end my tribute of thanks by exclaiming: "God bless you, dear Miss Hewson!" You were the teacher I needed at that crucial, vulnerable part of my young life. And without your smiling encouragement I might never have gone on to continue my writing in the back of the maths and radio-theory exercise books I quickly thrust under the desks of the night-school classes which I attended when my "working life" had truly begun.

John Hands



"Each of us has lives filled with good things and challenge in different measure. Sometimes there is so much going on, that we never get a chance to lift our heads up and look around beyond the edge of our lives, we never get a chance to see our lives from a different perspective. On Remembrance Day I usually ponder what my life would have been like had I lived through war. I am again humbled with gratitude for my good fortune that I have never faced that reality."

Rev. Brian J. Kiely

"Revolutionary change does not come as one cataclysmic moment (beware of such moments!) but as an endless succession of surprises, moving zigzag toward a more decent society. We don't have to engage in grand, heroic actions to participate in the process of change. Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world. To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places — and there are so many — where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvellous victory."

Howard Zinn



London's Big Voice Goes to South Africa

In January a youth empowerment project called Big Voice London launched, supported by the Supreme Court. The project works with disadvantaged young people from four schools in London to help them fulfil their potential.

In September the young people taking part had the unique opportunity to interview experts in equality and human rights in South Africa. This was done by setting up video links between South Africa and the UK and it was only possible because Kensington Unitarians provided funding for a volunteer to

travel to South Africa and set up the links. The volunteer was Jennifer Blair, founder of the project and one of the church's Sunday School teachers (so she made sure she visited the Unitarian Church in Cape Town).

In the first week the young people had the chance to speak to Jennifer Williams, the director of the Women's Legal Centre in Cape Town and Henk Smith from the Legal Resources Centre. They talked about empowerment to protect the rights of vulnerable people and the young people were inspired to hear about a group of nomadic farmers, who had been evicted during apartheid, but had reclaimed their land to find it was a diamond mine!

In the second week the young people heard from Isolde de Villiers at Pretoria University about access to education – discussing the recent rise in tuition fees in the UK and equality quotas in South Africa – and Judge Zeenat Carelse, one of the first women judges at the High Court in Johannesburg.

They also interviewed Zain Wilson from the South African Anxiety and Depression Group. Zain started a support group of 6 people, after suffering from mental health problems herself: her organisation now has clinics all over Southern Africa. She works extensively in the Townships, where there is hardly any mental health provision, and, after her interview, she arranged for Jennifer to visit one of the charity's support centres in a nearby Township.

Finally we met Justice Edwin Cameron, a Constitutional Court Judge who was the first public figure to live openly with HIV and who was appointed by Nelson Mandela. We asked why it was important to have diversity in the judiciary, how judges learn new things and about ways to involve the community in justice. The (frankly wonderful) answers are now online, so the young people can refer to them again and again.



The comparison with South Africa was incredibly valuable for the young people in London: it has raised their horizons, helped them speak directly to leading world experts they would never have met otherwise and allowed them to learn new skills.

Big Voice London is now writing up this comparison for their first report – filled with recommendations to help improve equality from the young people taking part. This report will be launched in the House of Commons in December 2011 and this would not have been possible without the help from Kensington Unitarians.

Jennifer Blair

Prospects

Sliding into November, the end of autumn
Well out of sight, we look forward to refreshers;
Guy Fawkes night, or coming-on Christmas,
Or the prospect of booking holidays abroad we can't
Really afford. Is this all we are waiting for?

Speak to me again about real possibilities; such as
The way through woods threatened by demolition,
Housing estates built like Victorian barracks,
The sale of air-space, the sun creeping a little nearer
With each new Spring: demolition of mountains:
The dead hand of winter on the gate of the South.

John Hands



Festival of Unitarians in Southern England

From the 3rd - 5th February 2012
at the Chatsworth Hotel, Worthing

**A weekend by the sea filled with
Celebration, Inspiration, and Education**

"Lighting the fuse for an explosion of Unitarian vitality"

- For Unitarians and other seekers with a passion for the future
- Sponsored by the London and Southeast district and open to all
- More than 20 workshops including workshops on spirituality, congregational health, worship
- Humour with a message from keynote speaker Robin Ince
- Multiple workshops: traditional, contemplative, contemporary, more!
- Programme for children and youth
- Bursaries available to make this event accessible to all
- Main worship service led by Rev. Patrick O'Neill

We would like to get a number of participants going along from Essex Church. The committee is keen to encourage people by making a contribution towards the cost of attending. Please speak to Sarah, Jane, or one of the committee ASAP if you are interested.

For more information: www.fusefest.org.uk

Recommended by the Charter for Compassion FB Group

11 Eleven Project



As soon as the clocks tick over to midnight on 11/11/11, you are free to unleash your creativity for 24 hours! If you have access to a film/video/digital camera, mobile phone, microphone, internet, or anything else that you record on and upload onto a computer, then you are invited to take part in the biggest creative project of our human history!

On this day, we want you to film, photograph, record some music, capture sounds, or blog. All submissions will have to be uploaded by November 22 (giving you 11 days to do it) and we will then go about the long process of creating a number of awesome pieces of work. These will include a world music collection, a photo book, and a documentary showing how the world lived on 11/11/11! The intention is to hold free screenings of the finished work around the world on September 21, 2012. Once the worldwide screenings have been held, we will be making the film available for purchase as a DVD or via digital download. All of the revenue from sales of the products will be split evenly among our chosen charities which are:

Save the Children / The Hunger Project / WWF /
Opportunity International / Global Voices / Hamlin Fistula

WHY are we doing this? Well it's quite simple really. We want to plant a seed of compassion in the world and allow people all over the planet to gain a perspective of this crazy rock that we all live on. Are people from different parts of the world really that different? Different cultures may have different traditions, but we're pretty sure a teacher in Madagascar is trying to achieve the same as a teacher in the USA, or a Muslim father wants the same for his children as a Jewish father! We want this to be used as a time capsule for people to look back on and see how the world was in 2011. We're looking for truthful stories from people around the globe that will give us a clear idea of how it is to live where you do, something that news channels or other programmes miss out on. But we're not giving you a totally blank canvas to work with (apparently that's a bit daunting for some), rather we're giving you 11 suggested topics to help you with your creativity.

**beginnings / heartbreak / make a wish /
faith / routine / water / courage /
play / darkness / beauty / love**

Website: www.11elevenproject.com

True Heart Theatre presents

'In The Mirror'

New Diorama Theatre, 15-16 Triton Street, NW1 3BF



Three British women, whose lives have been deeply influenced by challenges of bi-cultural identity East and West, have created performances which reveal their stories. Entertaining as well as moving, these stories have something to say to everyone in multicultural Britain. Every show will create an opportunity for a conversation with the audience, so that curiosity can be satisfied, resonances can be shared, differences can be negotiated.

'FACE' by Veronica Needa

11th November at 19.30 & 12th November at 14.30

Through a series of vignettes, Veronica tells stories of her Eurasian experience both here in the UK and in Hong Kong, her birthplace. Originally directed by Shu Wing Tang in Hong Kong, it has toured Asia and Europe since its commission by the HK Arts Centre in 1998. This latest incarnation is performed bilingually in English & Cantonese, suitable for mono-lingual speakers of either language, and is in two parts. First Veronica tells her story, and then in the second half she chats with the audience through the medium of playback theatre (improvisational theatre facilitating audience dialogue) with members of True Heart Theatre joining her onstage. **Price: £18 (£15)**

'There Are Two Perfectly Good Me(s): One Dead, the Other Unborn' by Lucy Sheen

9th November at 19.30 & 12th Nov 18.30

Lucy Sheen was adopted by an English family. Her Chinese roots were never discussed or disclosed to her until her adulthood. Growing up in England, questioning her identity has been challenging and necessary, with layers of revelation. This is a play in development, and will be followed by a post-show chat with the audience. **Price: £8.50 (£6.50)**

'Anna May Wong Must Die!' by Anna Chen

10th November at 19.30 & 12th November at 20.30

Broadcaster, journalist and blogger Madam Miaow, Anna Chen takes us on a personal journey through the life of Hollywood's first Chinese superstar. This work is a performative development of her BBC Radio 4 programme 'A Celestial Star in Piccadilly'. Anna's work is characterized by her wit & sharp insights, with a few songs thrown in for good measure and entertainment. This show is followed by a post-show chat with the audience. **Price: £8.50 (£6.50)**

More information and booking at www.newdiorama.com.
Box Office: 0844 209 0344.

Three Haikus

I

*Sepulchral piano
A youth intently plays: ah
The years, the years.*

II

*Droves of daffodils
Singing in choirs
Cantatas unheard.*

III

*Hand-in-hand over the hill
From Highgate to Hampstead;
Thirty years ago but still
Almost visible.*

John Hands

'First They Came for the Jews'



First they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for the Communists
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a Communist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a Trade Unionist

Then they came for the Catholics
and I did not speak out -
because I was a Protestant.

Then they came for me -
and there was no one left
to speak out for me.

Attributed to Martin Niemoller (1892-1984)

Translated from the German

Carolyn Appleby sent this piece in response to our Minister's message about "The Importance of Dissent" from the August/September issue of the church newsletter.

Pontoon Dock and the Thames Barrier Park

– Another adventure in East London

In a previous newsletter (June 2011) I mentioned my interest in travelling on the Docklands Light Railway, specifically talking about a visit to the Olympic Site viewing area near Pudding Mill Station and to Stratford, where so much is happening at the moment. Another of my favourite destinations is Pontoon Dock Station which opened in December 2005 and which is on the new extension of the DLR to Woolwich Arsenal. Being particularly high up, the station platforms afford very good views of the surrounding area, including the Royal Victoria Dock and the former Spiller's flour mill. Millennium Mills is a vast structure dating from 1905, now derelict, but no doubt earmarked for conversion to housing at some stage in the future. Pontoon Dock is one station away from London City Airport, whose runway lies between the Royal Albert and the King George V Docks.



However, my real reason for travelling to Pontoon Dock is that it is the alighting point on the DLR for the Thames Barrier Park. London of course is famous for its parks, many of which date back to previous centuries, but the Thames Barrier Park is one of the newest, opening in November 2000 and is described as 'the first riverside park in London for over 50 years'. It covers 22 acres, includes a children's play area and a five-a-side court and is already well used by the residents of the area, including school parties. On one occasion I saw a student film crew there. The former pontoon dock itself is now a sunken garden – called the Green Dock – which is beautifully laid out with shrubs and flowers. A particular feature of the design is that the yew hedges have been cut to suggest a wave pattern, reflecting the presence of the water nearby. The garden can be seen from walkways above and alongside it.

If you walk down to the end of the park, you will get excellent views of the river and of the Thames Barrier itself. The river is ever-changing, and the rise and fall of the tides never ceases to fascinate me. However, perhaps confusingly, you can't get access to the Barrier from here. For that you need to be on the south side of the river where the visitor centre is located. Just as you enter the park from the station you will find an attractive café, which has to be a bonus in any park. It's modern, comfortable and very light with glass on three sides so that you can sit and look at the park as you enjoy your cappuccino and chocolate croissant. An area near the café has been left uncultivated, and already you can count the many varieties of wild flowers which have made themselves a home here. This park and its café are one of my oases in the capital. London can be a busy and stressful place, and we all need oases from time to time where we can sit and contemplate the world.

In my previous article I was able to mention the new church building on West Ham Lane for our Stratford congregation. Can I point to a Unitarian connection here? Well not really, except that on your way to Pontoon Dock Station you may well pass through Limehouse. There used to be a mission situated on Elsa Street, called the Durning Hall Church and Institute. This was named after the Durning-Lawrence family who were great philanthropists for the Unitarian cause in the past (and some were members of Essex Church!). However it closed in 1946, probably after war damage, and the whole area was subsequently redeveloped with new housing. Eventually the settlement was replaced by the Durning Hall Community Centre in Forest Gate, now run by the Aston Mansfield Charity (see www.aston-mansfield.org.uk).

Howard Hague



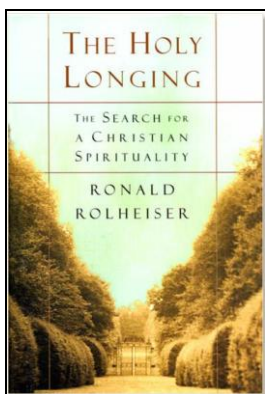
First, [becoming a member of a congregation] means that you are making a commitment to your spiritual journey. A commitment to explore, to learn, to stretch yourself. A commitment to care for yourself when you need care, to step back when you need room to breathe, and to re-engage when you can. A commitment to reflect about your own values and motivations, to examine your spiritual longings, and to speak up when you need something from this community.

Second... the covenant of membership includes a commitment to the institution... and to the other people who make up the gathered community here. It means a commitment to showing up — on Sunday mornings to worship, to special events, and to congregational meetings — as you are able. It means a commitment to help with the programs and ministries of the Fellowship in ways that are fulfilling to you. And it means a commitment to the financial well-being of this institution.

Finally, our faith asks us to make a commitment to healing our broken world. Part of our commitment as members is to think about how our spiritual journey is reflected in our relationships with the world outside of this Fellowship's walls. This means a commitment to live your values out in the world, and a commitment to do what we can to work for justice and peace.

On Membership - from the website of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Northern Westchester, NY

From www.spiritualityandpractice.com (a wonderful online resource curated by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat):



Teaching Stories

From 'The Holy Longing: The Search for Christian Spirituality' by Ronald Rolheiser

'The Holy Longing' presents a rounded and revelatory understanding of faith development and Christian spirituality, answering some key questions along the way.

Why would God want to take on human flesh?

"There is a marvellous story told about a four-year-old child who awoke one night frightened, convinced that in the darkness around her there were all kinds of spooks and monsters. Alone, she ran to her parents' bedroom. Her mother calmed her down and, taking her by the hand, led her back to her own room, where she put on a light and reassured the child with these words: 'You needn't be afraid, you are not alone here. God is in the room with you.' The child replied: 'I know that God is here, but I need someone in this room who has some skin!'"

To Practice: *Be an incarnation of God's loving and comforting presence for those around you during this holy season.*

Why go to church?

"Heaven, the scriptures assure us, will be enjoyed within the communal embrace of billions of persons of every temperament, race, background, and ideology imaginable. A universal heart will be required to live there. Thus, in this life, it is good to get some practice at this, good to be constantly in situations that painfully stretch the heart. Few things — and we certainly all admit this — stretch the heart as painfully as does church community. Conversely, when we avoid the pain and mess of ecclesial encounter to walk a less painful private road or to gather with only persons of our own kind, the heart need not and generally does not stretch. Going to church is one of the better cardiovascular spiritual exercises available."

To Practice: *Stretch your heart by participating regularly in the life of a congregation.*

Warden's Column



Let There be Light!

I had a bit of free time this week, so I decided to try and get to grips with the Church lightbulb box. This lives on the Top shelf of the middle Hall cupboard and theoretically contains spares of all the lightbulbs we use in the Church - and ONLY the lightbulbs we use. However, I didn't get round to re-organising it after we had the Hall lighting renewed last year, so I suspected it had got a bit out of date.

Frankly, I find the number of different lightbulbs we need for the church a bit confusing and depressing. However, now I've finally got round to updating the lightbulb record, I can see that the work on the hall and lobby didn't actually make matters worse. The fluorescent bulbs in the hall are of a type we didn't need before, but that's balanced by the stair lights changing – from a unique fitting used only there, to a compact fluorescent used in many places around the building – and the round spots in the hall and lobby are a type that were already used in my flat.

I had hoped that by systematically listing the bulbs we need, I'd be in a position to order online and get them delivered - but in some cases, even with a bulb and the box in front of me, there wasn't enough information to identify the correct product in the online catalogue. So I've had to give up the dream of free delivery and decide to make another trip to Ryness on Kensington High Street. I also decided that for now I wouldn't worry about getting spare bulbs for lights that don't need replacing yet (like the hall fluorescents) and just wait for one to fail so I can take it with me to the shop.

All in all, it was an oddly satisfying process, especially finding smaller cupboard boxes for each main type of bulb that fit neatly into the big box.

I remember being asked about my DIY skills when I had an interview for the job here and explaining that – on a good day – they did stretch to changing a lightbulb. That's the next step of course, so wish me luck as I break out the ladders and start grappling with the idiosyncrasies of our many different fittings – even more fittings than bulbs, naturally!

Jenny Moy



Multifaith Calendar of Festivals for November



✠ 1st November – All Saints' Day – Christian

All Saints' Day is also called All Hallows'. The work and witness of all Christian saints is remembered with thanksgiving, recognising that not all are known or specially celebrated. Many churches stress All Saints' Day rather than Hallowe'en, which falls the day before, by holding events for children.

✠ 2nd November – All Souls' Day – Christian

On All Souls' Day those who have departed this life are remembered and prayers offered on their behalf. From the beginning Christians have prayed for the dead. In the year 998, All Souls 'the faithful departed' began to be remembered in the Church calendar on this day.

☞ 7th November – Id-ul-Adha/Festival of Sacrifice – Muslim

This major Muslim festival marks the end of the Hajj (the pilgrimage to Makkah). Animals are sacrificed by pilgrims at Mina, on the way back to Makkah from Mount Arafat, in commemoration of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael. Muslims around the world share in the celebrations, sacrificing an animal if they can afford it, the meat being distributed to the poor and shared with family and friends.

☸ 10th November – Kathina Day – Buddhist

In the Theravada Buddhist tradition, Kathina Day is celebrated by the lay community offering monks new Kathina robes at the end of their three month Rains Retreat. The date of the festival varies according to when the rainy season arrives in different countries.

☼ 12th November – Anniversary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh – Bahá'í

The founder of the Bahá'í Faith was born in Tehran, Persia, in 1817, the eldest son of a Persian nobleman.

🌐 13th November – Remembrance Sunday

The Sunday nearest to Armistice Day (11th November), when those who died in the two World Wars and subsequent wars are remembered.

☞ 21st November – Birthday of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first Sikh Guru (1469) – Sikh

Important anniversaries associated with the lives of the Gurus are referred to as Gurpurbs. They are marked with an akhand path, an uninterrupted reading of the Guru Granth Sahib Ji, completed on the morning of the festival, kirtan (musical recitation of hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib Ji) and katha (lectures on Sikhism). The congregation will share a meal (langar) from the free kitchen, and the celebrations often include firework displays and illumination of the gurdwara.

☞ 24th November - Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji (1675) – Sikh

In 1675, the ninth Guru was executed in public, in Delhi for upholding an individual's right to worship in the manner of his or her choice.

✠ 27th November – Advent Sunday – Christian

Advent is the time when Christians prepare for celebrating the birth of Jesus at Christmas. The four Sundays of Advent are often marked with the lighting of candles on an advent crown, culminating with the Christmas candle on 25th December, symbolising the light of Christ coming into the world.

☞ 27th November – Al-Hijra - New Year's Day (1433 AH) – Muslim

This day commemorates the Hijra, or migration of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) from Makkah to al-Madinah in 622 CE. Muslim years are dated from this event and termed AH (After the Hijrah).

✠ 30th November – St Andrew's Day – Christian

Andrew was the first disciple to follow Jesus. He was present on the day of Pentecost, but little is known of his life afterwards, until he was crucified at Patras, in Greece. St Andrew is the Patron Saint of Scotland, and his day is celebrated by Scots around the world.



'Finding Our Voice'

Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall

Sunday 20th November
12.30 to 1.15pm, at Essex Church

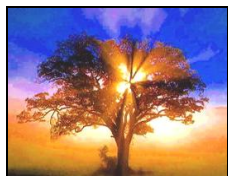


Margaret Marshall has worked as a professional singer all her adult life and is also a very experienced singing teacher. Along with Harold Lorenzelli she has been singing in our choir here at Essex Church for over thirty years now and we're delighted that she is now leading monthly sessions to help us all find our voice.

These workshops are for anyone who is prepared to open their mouth and make a sound and Margaret will show us how to improve the quality and strength of our voices. Using a few simple exercises we'll gain joy and confidence in our singing by learning how to produce and develop the voice, something everyone can do. We'll work with the breath and overcome unconscious blocks that can prevent us singing with our true potential.

Fun and achievement are guaranteed and these sessions are designed for everyone, whatever your experience or ability. All are welcome.

One Light Spiritual Gathering 'Love of Creation'



Friday 11th November 2011
6.30-8.15pm – Here at Essex Church

This month there will be a beautiful Tree of Life meditation from the Kabbalah tradition led by Rev. Suzanne Cohen student and teacher of Kabbalah for 20 years.

The gatherings are led by graduates of the Interfaith Seminary. All are welcome.

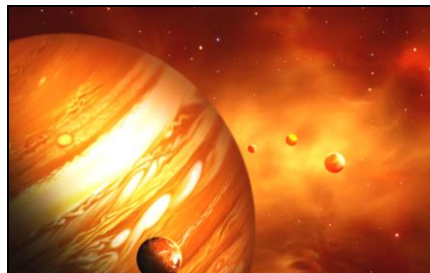
Peaceful and Joyous connection with the Divine, the One Light at the Heart of All through music, meditation and inspiration from many spiritual traditions.

For further information contact service hosts:

Rev. Pamela Ramsden - 07966 478 980

Rev. Kathryn Reynolds - 07976 739 286

Morning Person



God, best at making in the morning, tossed stars and planets, singing and dancing, rolled Saturn's rings spinning and humming, twirled the earth so hard it coughed and spat the moon up, brilliant bubble floating around it for good, stretched holy hands till birds in nervous sparks flew forth from them and beasts—lizards, big and little, apes, lions, elephants, dogs and cats cavorting, tumbling over themselves, dizzy with joy when God made us in the morning too, both man and woman, leaving Adam no time for sleep so nimbly was Eve bouncing out of his side till as night came everything and everybody, growing tired, declined, sat down in one soft descended Hallelujah.

Vassar Miller

'The Core of Religion'

Karen Armstrong gives Annual
Younghusband Lecture



Wednesday 7th December, 6.30pm
Liberal Jewish Synagogue,
28 St. John's Wood, London NW8 7HA

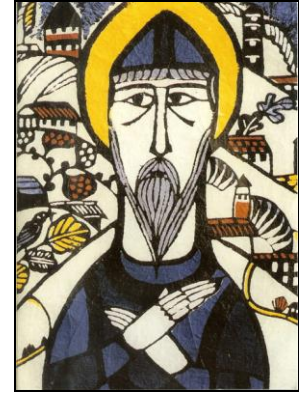
Karen Armstrong is the internationally celebrated commentator on contemporary religion and author of numerous books. Her most recent book, "Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life" has led to the founding of the Charter for Compassion. On 7th December, at 6:30pm, she will give the annual Younghusband Lecture, sponsored by World Congress of Faiths, on "The Core of Religion".

Entry is by ticket only, available from the World Congress of Faiths at 125 Salisbury Road, London NW6 6RG. Tel: 020 8959 3129 or online at www.worldfaiths.org (tickets are £5 for members of WCF, £10 for non-members).

'Benedict's Message for Today'

Sermon by David Francis Darling – 4th September 2011

An audio podcast of this sermon is available on our website.



As most of you know I spent seventeen years as an Anglican Franciscan Friar and lived under the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Most people assume, if they think about it at all, that all monks, nuns and friars make these same three vows, summed up as no money, no sex and do as you're told. A slightly cynical ex-priest friend of mine, now married, said to me once that that could sum up marriage as well!

But in fact, not all monks and nuns do make these vows. The sons and daughters of St Benedict take three very different vows. They do take a vow of obedience but not of poverty or chastity, though celibacy is in the small print of the Rule.

Their vows are Stability, Obedience and Conversion of Life.

Some of you may have visited Worth Abbey, not far from here, it's the Benedictine Monastery that was the setting for the 2005 reality TV show "The Monastery" which over three hour long programmes showed a group of seekers spending six weeks at the Monastery and the effect that it had on them. This was reality TV at its most sophisticated and attracted an audience of several million. It is said that after the programme was televised there was a great surge in demand for copies of St Benedict's Rule (still a best seller after 1400 years) and the number of people wanting to go on retreat also soared.

I was intrigued when I discovered Jennifer Kavanagh's book "The World is our Cloister" that I read from in our second reading. Here is a Quaker exploring the gift of Monastic Life for the 21st Century. Let me share with you a bit more from her Introduction to the book.

"Tell us" he said, "of monasticism for our time, for the thousands who want it"

The speaker was an enquirer at a weekly outreach session in London, to which hundreds of men and women of all ages and backgrounds have flocked over the past five years, to share their spiritual paths and to find a spiritual home.

These hundreds and thousands are no longer flocking to traditional forms of Monasticism. Contrary to public opinion it is not behind monastery walls that most contemporary contemplative life is undertaken. There have always been those within the monastic tradition who are engaged in the world to some degree, and these are the orders to which people in the modern era increasingly feel drawn. Even more, men and women of different faiths feel called not to withdraw, but to live among others and actively engage with them: to live a committed life in the world. This book is an exploration of what it means to live as a contemplative in the world; it attempts to examine how people face the difficulties of being in the world but not of it – and what that means. Such a life may not even be within the confines of a traditional religious structure..... Drawing from the stories of men and women across religious boundaries, this book affirms a way of life to which Christian, Buddhist, Hindu Muslim and those with no label can relate."

So, recognising the impact that "The Monastery" had on people and the desire of Kavanagh to explore the relevance of monastic life for today I wondered whether reflecting on the Benedictine vows of Stability, Obedience and Conversion of Life might have something to offer our Liberal religious tradition so let's take a look at these three elements of this religious framework.

As I have said before, when I was learning how to preach I was told that the only person that the preacher must ensure hears their message is the preacher! So my thoughts on Stability are aimed at me, but everyone else is welcome to listen in. My problem with stability is probably the reason I was a Friar not a monk. Monks stay still and Friars move about!

So what does the vow of stability mean? Well at a superficial level it means that a monk or nun is a member of a particular monastery, they may be sent to a daughter house of the monastery or even work alone for a period of time but the monastery is their base for life. But Stability is more than having a permanent address, it's about being rooted, grounded, not running away from difficult or painful situations but dealing with life here and now as it is. It's also about dealing with ourselves as we are, warts and all. I remember once speaking to one of the Sisters who belonged to the Order of Poor Clares, women in the Franciscan family who live a life of stability and enclosure spending most of their life living, working and praying with the same group of women in the same convent. Her community had been through a particularly difficult period with two groups emerging within the community who had very different views about how they should live out the vision of Francis and Clare in the 21st Century. She told me that she had been discussing the problem with a priest who suggested that they should split into two separate communities. "But you see" she said to me "He has missed the point of our life- we live a life of enclosure not to cut us off from life but so that we can deal with the reality of life- the answer to conflict isn't running from it but dealing with it. It's the grit in the oyster that produces the pearl!"

Stability, however, isn't the same as stagnation. There will be times when we have to move on, when things will change. There are times when I have to acknowledge the soil isn't right for my plant to flourish but that's different from a knee jerk reaction to an event or situation.

One of the benefits of our Unitarian community is that we are quite good at dealing with diversity and the conflicts that that can bring but the downside of our community is that, on the whole, we are a community of seekers and there is a danger that we will keep moving on until we find the perfect religious community, that is one that agrees with me! The desire for stability can be a great gift to us.

'Benedict's Message for Unitarians'

Sermon by David Francis Darling (continued)

Obedience isn't a concept that one automatically associates with Unitarians. We are a community of free thinkers who value independence of thought. But obedience in the Benedictine sense isn't just about "doing what you are told". The root of the word comes from the Latin *audire*, to listen, to hear the other person. Obedience is about mutual listening, being open to the needs of others, it challenges us to see the bigger picture, not just to view the world from my point of view. When I was a Friar one of the times when I was most challenged by my vow of obedience was when I had to be obedient to myself. I was the Novice Guardian of the community, responsible for the training of men entering the community. In my first year in this post we had a surge of new candidates, nothing to do with me! This meant we needed to begin their time with us at one of the larger houses. The most suitable was our monastery in rural Worcestershire. I had hated my time there as a Novice and it was the last place I wanted to live but it was the right place for the situation so I had to obey myself and go and live there. It wasn't as bad as I had imagined!

Of course to listen to one another we have to talk to one another and all of us have a responsibility to speak out and speak up. Obedience doesn't allow us to grumble behind people's backs. And we need to ensure that everyone in the community has a voice. St Benedict in his Rule, advises the Abbott of the need to listen to the youngest brother in the monastery for often they are the ones that see a situation with fresh eyes, they see the reality of a situation that the rest of us are blind to. So perhaps Obedience can be a gift for free thinking Unitarians.

'Conversion of Life' – again, an odd concept for Unitarians. We don't go in for conversion much, but this vow is an acknowledgement that we don't always get it right. WE can be rooted (stability), we can listen to one another (Obedience) but we can still get it wrong. So in the words of the song, we need to pick ourselves up, dust ourselves down and start all over again! That's conversion of life.

But this vow also implies that we both recognise and acknowledge when we get it wrong. We Unitarians are not really into sin, or at least at describing what we do as sinful. Many of us have been hurt by the overemphasis on sin by other religious groups and we value a guilt free zone but is our freedom based in reality?

We certainly don't speak much about original sin except to say that we don't believe in it, as I have said from this pulpit. I was a bit surprised therefore to read some thoughts on original sin from Revd Forrest Church, that great Unitarian Universalist theologian.

In his book 'The Cathedral of the World' that I read from last time he writes this:

"Ever since Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent, we humans have avoided taking responsibility for our actions (and therefore accountability for their consequences) by proclaiming that the buck stops elsewhere. That, in a nut shell, is original sin. Liberal theology doesn't take sin and evil seriously enough. American fundamentalism takes evil seriously, and would certainly seem to have a doctrine of sin."

But by trivializing sin into a moralistic catalogue of personal foibles, fundamentalists often appear to reserve the badge of real evil for others. With sin, however, there are no others. The world is not divided into sheep and goats. Each of us is both sheep and goat, making original sin a corrective to any theology based on an "us versus them" model and conducive as well to the development of a clear eyed unsentimental universalism. Martin Luther put it this way "The ultimate human sin is our unwillingness to concede that we are sinners"

Perhaps in another address we can explore the liberating effects of Original Sin!

Although we don't normally have a penitential rite at the beginning of our services and we don't have sacramental confession I do believe that outside of the services we quite good at acknowledging the reality of our lives and helping one another to move on but there is a danger that for those of us who don't have a safe space in which we can be honest about our faults and failings, we also don't have a safe space to be nurtured and healed. We need to create stable listening communities in which each of us can turn around and start all over again.

As we move out from here into the busy week ahead let us give thanks for this community and ponder on the ways in which the framework given by St Benedict 1400 years ago might still speak to and challenge us today.

Amen

Forthcoming Unitarian District Events: Dates for your Diary



Saturday 3rd December – A workshop at Golders Green led by the General Assembly President Rev Dr Ann Peart on 'spiritual journeys through life'.

Saturday 17th March 2012 – The next district meeting will take place on this date – all are welcome. This is a good way to meet Unitarians from other congregations and find out more about our wider community.

For more information about the district visit: www.ukunitarians.org.uk/pulse/



Christmas 2011 at Essex Church

Carol Service and Congregational Lunch Sunday 18th December 2011

We will be holding a Christmas carol service, followed by a congregational potluck lunch, on Sunday 18th December. Why not bring a friend along for this festive occasion?

Candlelit Christmas Eve Service Saturday 24th December 2011, 5-6pm

On Christmas Eve there will be a special candlelit service at 5pm (please note we will not hold a service on Sunday 25th, Christmas Day, due to the lack of public transport).

Christmas Eve Meal Saturday 24th December 2011, 7-9pm

As has become a tradition at Essex Church, a few members of the congregation are planning to go out for dinner at a local restaurant, after the service on Christmas Eve. The meal will probably be over by 9pm or thereabouts. We will probably have to book a table in early December so please listen out for further announcements during November so you can sign up if you would like to come.

Essex Church Creativity Group 'Bring Your Own Crafts' Tuesday 15th November 2011, 7.00-9.00pm



We have been experimenting with a new format for the church creativity group throughout 2011.

Instead of having a specific organised activity every month, which takes quite a lot of planning, we have decided that (most months) participants will simply be invited to bring their own art and craft projects along and enjoy the support and fellowship of the group. We are still intending to offer a specific activity once in a while and will work on projects for the church from time to time.

As ever, all are welcome, and the sessions are sociable and encouraging (with plenty of snacks to share).

Sunday Services at Essex Church



6th November, 11am – “Seeking the Spiritual in Western Art”

Service led by
Rev. Sarah Tinker and Heidi Ferid

The history of western art has been profoundly shaped by the search to express the spiritual. In this service we will explore this history and the links between art and spirituality.

13th November, 11am – “Remembrance Sunday”

Service led by
Rev. Sarah Tinker and Jim Corrigan

In our traditional Remembrance Sunday service we will pay tribute to all those who have lost their lives in warfare and to the efforts people have made throughout history both to avert war and to help heal the wounded and broken.

12.30pm - **Small-Group Communion**,
led by Jim Corrigan (lasting ~30 minutes)

20th November, 11am – “Defenders of Faith?”

Service led by **Rev. Sarah Tinker**

At the start of Inter-faith Week here in Britain this service will celebrate the part Unitarians play in encouraging inter-faith dialogue and explore what we can learn from such connections with other people of faith.

27th November, 11am – “Advent” Service led by **Rev. Sarah Tinker**

Advent is traditionally described as a time of waiting. Today we will be considering the value of pausing in life, of taking stock of what has been and what is now and that which is to come.